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COMMENT ON THE SOVIET NOTE TO PAKISTAN

The Soviet note of 30 November to Pakistan asking for "clarification" of press reports that the United States and Pakistan are promoting an "aggressive" military bloc in the Middle East and are negotiating an agreement for air bases "near the frontiers of the USSR", is a standard Soviet reaction. The note follows an increasing volume of Soviet propaganda stressing Moscow's concern about alleged American efforts to conclude a series of bilateral treaties with Middle Eastern states with the aim of ultimately welding them into a "Northern Middle East Command."

Moscow's sensitivity to the establishment of bases near Orbit frontiers was most recently reflected in a note to Greece on 26 October protesting the American-Greek agreement for the establishment of Western bases on Greek soil. Similarly, the Kremlin objected to the possible establishment of a Middle East Command in November 1951 through notes to the Arab states, Israel, Turkey, Great Britain, France and the United States. In August 1952, Moscow succeeded in inducing Afghanistan to postpone indefinitely its plan to develop oil resources close to the Soviet frontier with French technical assistance. It presumably hopes to accomplish a similar end in the case of Pakistan.

The USSR, however, has no political or economic hold over Pakistan, and the Communist Party in Pakistan is extremely weak. Pakistan has little to fear from the USSR except a military invasion of a type calculated to touch off World War III. Realistic political and military leaders in Karachi will be unimpressed by the Soviet note, though they will make a correct and noncommittal reply.

India, on the other hand, will take the note as confirmation of its warning that any military aid agreement between Pakistan and the United States would bring the cold war to South Asia. Prime Minister Nehru may be expected to make an impassioned plea to Vice President Nixon, presently in New Delhi, urging the United States to end any negotiations now under way. The Indian press will follow suit in strong language.

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